

at how Aristotle understands our telos as eudaimonia and how he communicates the relationship between our well-being and being a moral person.

MacIntyre argues that we can only correctly discuss morality by thinking about it in a teleological framework. He says that when considering how human nature plays a role in ethics, there must be an understanding of telos, as it is what gives the contrasts between human nature “as-it-is” and human nature “as-it-could-be.”⁴ Human nature as-it-is desires what appears good for us. In contrast, human nature as-it-could-be desires what is *actually* good for us. Having the distinction of human nature as-it-could-be is crucial as otherwise, we only understand human nature as-it-is. This means we think of human nature as desiring only what appears to be good for us. MacIntyre says there should be three elements to any schema of ethics, “the conception of untutored human nature, the conception of the precepts of rational ethics, and the conception of human nature as it could be if it realized its telos.”⁵ If any of these three elements are to be intelligible, they must reference the other two.⁶ By removing this teleological thinking, we can only understand human nature as a force that does not align with moral behavior. Enlightenment moral theorists were “inheriting a set of moral injunctions on the one hand and a conception of human nature on the other which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other.”⁷ The other consequence of losing teleological thinking is that ethics doesn’t have an end it is moving toward. If you do not have a conception of human nature as-it-could-be, then you view human nature as something that could only be independent or counter to what is moral.

Kant does not share this mindset, for him happiness and human nature cannot be aligned with what is moral. Happiness is either tangential to what is moral or works against it. Kant does say that “to secure one’s own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly)” but the reason he thinks this is because, in a state of unhappiness, there might “become a great temptation to transgress one’s duties.”⁸ This passage gets to the heart of how Kant views happiness. Personal happiness is not good in and of itself. It is good only in so far as being unhappy might cause someone to not abide by their duties. Kant also articulates that happiness can get in the way of being moral if not accompanied by a desire to align with duty. Kant said that the conditions “that complete well-being and contentment with one’s conditions which is called happiness make for pride – unless there is a good will to correct their influence.”⁹ Continuing with this, Kant says that actions have the most moral worth if done without inclination and only to align with duty. If someone acts “solely from duty, then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth.”¹⁰ But actions that come solely from duty may not even be possible according to Kant, as “there cannot with certainty be at all inferred – that

4 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 52.

5 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 53.

6 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 53.

7 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 55.

8 Kant, *Grounding*, 12.

9 Kant, *Grounding*, 7.

10 Kant, *Grounding*, 11.

some secret impulse of self-love, merely appearing as the idea of duty.”¹¹ To summarize, for Kant, happiness only has moral worth as far as it affects our ability to accord with duty, and actions have more moral worth if done without any sort of personal inclination and only for the sake of duty.

However, it is important to note that how Kant articulates happiness differs from how Aristotle uses the term. Aristotle’s happiness is a translation of the word “eudaimonia.” Though eudaimonia is often translated as happiness, eudaimonia is not an emotion in the way we think that happiness is. Instead, he talks about long-term well-being. As Aristotle says, “one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy.”¹² I don’t think that Kant uses the term the same way Aristotle does. In one passage, Kant says about duty that “we find that the more a cultivated reason devotes itself to the aim of enjoying life and happiness, the further does man get away from true contentment.”¹³ Here, human happiness and “contentment” are seen as opposed things, rather than contentment just being a factor of happiness. Also, Kant is not saying that you act according to duty so you can be content, but instead that it will come as a consequence.

For Aristotle, unlike Kant, happiness is not only aligned with what is good, what is good is happiness. Aristotle articulates the idea of moving towards our telos of eudaimonia as the ultimate good, and our eudaimonia depends on our ability to be virtuous within our community. As articulated earlier, Aristotle thinks that “every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good.”¹⁴ This does not mean that every action achieves good, but it is always done intending it. And this good that Aristotle thinks all actions aim at is eudaimonia. Aristotle believes our telos is eudaimonia because it is something that we “always choose for itself and never for the sake of something else,” and all other goods we aim for, such as honor, pleasure, or reason, are incidental to our aim of eudaimonia.¹⁵ Aristotle says that eudaimonia comes “as a result of virtue and some process of learning or training.”¹⁶ And the way that you move towards your eudaimonia is by practicing the virtues. Virtues are “a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean.”¹⁷ These virtues are habits you practice; if you practice them and put them into action, they will move you toward eudaimonia. These virtues include courage, honesty, friendliness, and others. But for Aristotle, it is not enough to practice the virtues, for if you truly hold them, you will enjoy them. Aristotle says, “the man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good; since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly.”¹⁸ This passage in particular serves as an interesting dichotomy to Kant’s thinking. For Kant, an action has the most moral worth if it is done without being motivated by inclination, while for Aristotle,

11 Kant, *Grounding*, 19.

12 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a.

13 Kant, *Grounding*, 8.

14 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a.

15 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b.

16 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b.

17 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a.

18 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a.

